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ABSTRACT

To gather evidence on black-white differences in media-use habits, a study compared mass media and news exposure among university students in sub-Sahara Africa and in the United States. Two versions of a self-administered questionnaire were developed, one for each sample group. One part of the questionnaire--common to both groups--sought to measure respondents' exposure to (1) U.S. news (defined as news about the United States in U.S. newspapers, (2) international news in U.S. newspapers, (3) U.S. news in U.S. news magazines, (4) international news in U.S. news magazines, (5) U.S. news on U.S. radio, (6) international news on U.S. radio, (7) U.S. news on television, and (8) international news on television. Media exposure was measured as either high or low, in comparison with the exposure levels of all other respondents in each sample group. The African students' perceptions of the economic and political relations between the United States and their home countries were also measured. The findings revealed that sub-Saharan students often depended more on the mass media for U.S. news and about equally on interpersonal and media sources for international news. The sub-Saharan students also generally reported significantly higher exposures to U.S. and foreign mass media than did U.S. students. The U.S. students preferred the mass media for both news types. (HOD)

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A Cross-Cultural Study of News-Media Preferences: African versus White U.S. Students

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A CROSS-CULTURAL STUDY OF NEWS-MEDIA PREFERENCES

African versus White U.S. Students

Research evidence has consistently showed that there is a high dependence on the mass media for news among U.S. audiences in general. Roper surveys (1985) have, since 1959, showed a consistent preference by the American public for the mass media as their source of most news. Other studies have also reported that while the mass media were the most pervasive first source of information, interpersonal communication played a significant role in the diffusion of news that was "shocking," or was of near-epic or crisis proportions (Adams et al., 1969; Fathi, 1973; Gantz, 1983; Gantz and Pittman, 1976; Haroldsen and Harvey, 1979; and Trodahl and Dam, 1965-1966). Even then, there was the dependence on the mass media to which people turned for the verification of, and for additional information on, the interpersonally disseminated news. Occasionally, the use of interpersonal sources was dependent on factors such as (1) the need to cross-check information from other sources with interpersonal sources; (2) how atypical the news event was and the time of day of its occurrence; (3) access to the mass media; (4) whether the mass media interrupted regular programming with frequent bulletins; and (5) the ease and appropriateness of the use of interpersonal channels (see, for example, Fry and McCain, 1983; Gantz, 1983; Faber and O'Guinn, 1984).

However, among these audiences, racial differences between blacks and whites have been identified in media exposure, perception, and effects. Whites expose themselves to more print media than do blacks (Bogart, 1972). Blacks consider television the most credible advertising medium while whites consider magazines the most credible (Durand et al., 1979). Furthermore, high television

entertainment viewing was related to a low self-esteem for blacks, but not for whites (Tan and Tan, 1979). And both races have different media-socialization and media-gratification behaviors which result not merely from differences in the social standings of the two groups, but from differences between black and white cultures (Gerson, 1966; Atkin, et al., 1983; Stroman and Becker, 1978). There is, however, relatively little research on cultural differences in media-use patterns between white U.S. students and African students in the United States, even though the latter represent a growing proportion of black students, and are a socially significant group, on U.S. campuses. Research in this area will provide additional evidence on black-white differences in media-use habits.

MEDIA USE IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

The use of of the (modern) mass media is comparatively minimal among audiences in the developing countries. Ugboajah (1979) identifies three types of audiences commonly found in Africa: (1) the active-participatory which constitutes the small group of elites and the ruling class; (2) the pseudo-participatory which comprises people who have abandoned the rural areas for the urban centers; and (3) the non-participatory which comprises the rest of the population which relies almost totally on traditional information sources. The non-participatory audience is the largest of the three. This means that a majority of Africa's audiences is untouched by any mass medium.

Africa has fewer media facilities than any other continent. Schramm (1976) predicts that Africa will reach the UNESCO minumum of 10 copies of daily newspapers for 100 people in 2035. In sub-Saharan Africa, the number of radio receivers per thousand population is 62, compared with 381 for Europe and 1,942 for North America. Eighteen of the region's 46 countries do not have television services, resulting in 6.5 television receivers per 1,000 people. In contrast,

there are 264 television receivers per thousand population in Europe; 604 in North America.

Given this relative lack of the mass media in sub-Saharan Africa and their minuscule use by the region's audiences, one wonders what their media-use pattern will be in a media-saturated country. Ugboajah (1972) and Dissanayake (1977), for example, noted that the credibility and familiarity of traditional (word-of-mouth) communication were some of the reasons why the African attached great significance to it. Uche (1985) found that radio use occurred commonly when a crisis was anticipated, but that word-of-mouth was the first source of information when a crisis had occurred. Okigbo (1985) reported that 77 percent of his non-random sample of Nigerian students in the United States discussed Nigerian affairs often or very often with fellow Nigerians; however, more than one-half said that they looked for news about Nigeria often or very often in American newspapers and in non-Nigerian magazines.

Although it may be argued that not all sub-Saharan African students in the United States have media-use patterns that are consistent with the traditional media-use descriptions, it is possible that the salience of their cultural values will play a significant role in their mass-media behavior in a foreign country. Some of these phenomena are evident even among U.S. blacks, as Barnes-Harden (1984: 32) observes. In reference to "the undying quality of the African nature of (U.S.) blacks," she writes:

> Even though far removed from Africa, their everyday mannerisms include African uses of certain foods, knowledge of the medicinal value of plant life (herbs), concepts of time and space, world view, cosmology, verbal and nonverbal behavior, and perception of life and death.

PURPOSE

Based on these descriptions, this study examines media-use patterns from a comparative standpoint: among African and white U.S. students at a large

Midwestern university. A justification for this study, from a broader perspective, is the limited evidence on foreign students' habits, outside of an extensive treatment of some of their adaptational and sociopsychological characteristics (see, for example, Wong-Rieger, 1984). However, foreign student enrollment, which was 342,113 during the 1984/1985 academic year, has generally increased on U.S. campuses since 1954 (Open Doors, 1984/85). [Little research has also been conducted among American students studying abroad (see, for example, Sell, 1983).] As Mowlana and McLaughlin (1969: 511) point out:

> Despite the increasingly significant role of the international students in the relations among groups and nations--and the consequent effects of such relationships upon individuals and institutions--<u>little attention has been devoted to the study of media exposure among foreign students</u>. [italics added.]

Consequently, this study attempts to provide some evidence on such students by comparing their news source preferences with those of U.S. students. Spaulding and Flack (1976: 295) emphasize the need for such a comparative research: ". . . comparative study of foreign and American students' opinion on a range of public issues with a view to assessing coincidence and differences. . . . "

HYPOTHESES

In addressing some aspects of this research limitation, the following questions are posed:

> (1) How do sub-Saharan African (Ethiopian and Nigerian) students in the United States keep abreast of issues and news events in the United States and in foreign countries?
>
> (2) How much comparative dependence is placed on the mass media and on interpersonal channels for U.S. and international news by the students?
>
> (3) Comparatively how much reliance is placed on the U.S. and foreign media for news by U.S. and sub-Saharan African students?

Answers to these questions are provided in the form of direct tests of five hypotheses:

H1: Sub-Saharan African students' dependence on interpersonal communication channels for news will be relatively higher than their dependence on the mass media; U.S. students' dependence on the mass media for news will be relatively higher than their dependence on interpersonal channels.

"Dependence" was defined as the extent to which respondents reported that they attached importance to a medium as a source of U.S. and international news, ranging from "extremely important" to "extremely unimportant."

It is predicted that U.S. students will make a greater use of the mass media than of interpersonal channels. Mowlana and McLaughlin (1969) compared rankings of the perceived importance of sources of general information and news among U.S. and foreign students and found that students from Asia and the Middle East used the oral media more than did students from Europe and the Americas. The rationale for this hypothesis, then, is the extensive use of word-of-mouth communications, even among the well-educated, as a major channel of information-diffusion in sub-Saharan Africa (Uche, 1985; Ugboajah, 1985; Abu-Lughod, 1963).

H2: Sub-Saharan African students tend in general to be relatively more exposed to the foreign mass media and to be relatively less exposed to the U.S. mass media for news than are U.S. students.

This hypothesis is based partly on the assumption that the cross-cultural experiences and contacts to which foreign students are in general exposed present a wider range of possibilities for exposure to foreign news sources than U.S. students have. Furthermore, the relatively little foreign news, particularly on sub-Saharan Africa, in the U.S. media will encourage the use of the foreign news media whose news emphasis relates more closely to

"international news." (In this study, "international news" is defined as news about countries other than the United States.) In other words, because the U.S. mass media underreport international news (see, for example, Wilhoit and Weaver, 1983; Mowlana, 1986:36-40; Mowlana, 1985), African audiences in the United States will seek international news from the foreign media.

H3: The amount of exposure to U.S. news in the U.S. mass media among sub-Saharan African students will be positively related to the
(a) favorability of their perceptions of the economic and political relations between the United States and their home contries;
(b) students' length of residence in the United States;
(c) extent of the students' sociability in the United States with U.S. nationals.

Hypothesis 3(a) is derived in part from findings by Kariel and Rosenvall (1984) and by Charles et al. (1979) that the volume of trade between nations has implications for international news flow. Other studies (Robinson and Sparkes, 1976; Sparkes, 1978; Rosengren, 1980; Rosengren, 1977; Hester, 1971) either established or made arguments for similar relationships. It is, therefore, predicted that extramedia variables such as the perceived quality of trade and political relations between nations--which, in large part, influence the content of the international news flow--will play some role in media exposure.

The hypothesized relationship between length of residence in the United States and media use is based on a finding by Mowlana and McLaughlin (1969) that the longer foreign students remained in the United States, the more they made use of the U.S. print media as information sources. (However, students from the Third World continue to rely on interpersonal channels even in the United States.)

The extent of "sociability"--Hypothesis 3(c)--was defined as participation in, and association with, group activities that predominantly involved

Americans; and the extent to which sub-Saharan African students mixed socially with U.S. nationals. Based on findings by Selltiz, et al. (1963:207-214, 274-276), Selltiz and Cook (1962:7-3), and on findings from additional analyses of the Morris (1960:72-77) scores that foreign students' personal-social relations with U.S. nationals had some relationships to their favorable dispositions toward the United States and its institutions, it was assumed that the use of the U.S. mass media would increase with increased "socialization" with U.S. nationals.

H4: Among sub-Saharan African students, the amount of exposure to the foreign mass media and to international news in the U.S. media will be positively related to their degree of interest in international news.

Interest in international news was measured by the question: "How interested are you in international news?" Response categories were "extremely interested," "interested," "not interested," and "extremely uninterested." The greater the self-identified interest, the higher the score. This hypothesis is based on the assumption that greater interest in foreign news will lead to greater exposure to such news in both foreign and U.S. media.

H5: Among U.S. students, the amount of exposure to
(1) international news in the U.S. media and
(2) the foreign mass media
will be positively related to the students'
(a) interest in international news;
(b) extent of foreign travel;
(c) contacts with foreign nationals in the United States.

Hypothesis 5(a), like the preceding one, is based on the assumption that greater interest in international news will be associated with greater exposure to the foreign media and to international news in the U.S. media.

Hypotheses 5(b) and 5(c) assume that exposure to foreign cultures either through travel or interaction with foreign nationals will be reflected in the kinds of media news such students will be exposed to. Thus, the widening of one's frame of reference, as a consequence of extensive foreign contacts, will be reflected in the use of the international news media. Research findings support this proposition. Deutsch (1969) examined cross-cultural relations between American and foreign college students and American students' interests in international issues and found that there was a significant relationship between interaction with foreign students and American students' "internationalism." He, however, cautioned against the interpretation of any causal relationships between the variables. Shaffer and Dowling (1968) also investigated similar relationships and found that friendships with foreign students encouraged American students to take a broader interest in domestic and international affairs and to re-examine their attitudes toward the domestic and national policies of the U.S. government. Lowe et al. (1984) found that international education exchange programs encouraged U.S. host families to develop a more complex and differentiated view of the world.

METHOD

THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The objective of this study is to compare the mass media exposure patterns of two sample groups: sub-Saharan African and U.S. students at a large Midwestern university. A self-administered questionnaire was developed in two versions, one for each of the U.S. and African sample groups. One part of the questionnaire--common to both groups--sought to measure respondents' exposure to: (1) U.S. news (defined to the entire sample as news about the United States) in U.S. newspapers; (2) international news in U.S. newspapers; (3) U.S. news in U.S. news magazines; (4) international news in U.S. news magazines; (5) U.S.

news on U.S. radio; (6) international news on U.S. radio; (7) U.S. news on television; and (8) international news on television.

Media exposure was measured as either "high" or "low," in comparison with the exposure levels of all other respondents in each sample group. For the African sample, questions on their previous exposure to the U.S. media while in their home countries were also asked. The "sociability" characteristics of all respondents were also measured.

The other part of the research instrument, directed only at the African sample, measured students' perceptions of the economic and political relations between the United States and their home countries.

THE SAMPLE

The two sub-Saharan African nations--Ethiopia and Nigeria--that were most highly represented at the university were used. Among the sub-Saharan African countries represented on U.S. campuses nationwide, these two countries have some of the highest enrollments (Open Doors, 1984/85).

One hundred fifty-two questionnaires were mailed to all registered Nigerian students; 33 were distributed to Ethiopian students. One hundred twenty questionnaires were properly completed and returned by the Nigerian subsample, for a 79% response rate. Twenty-nine were returned by the Ethiopian subsample, resulting in an 88% response rate.

Because the U.S. sample was matched demographically (that is, on class and college variables) with the African sample, a stratified random selection of white U.S. students was drawn from class enrollments. Four hundred seventy-four questionnaires were distributed in classes; 293 were returned. Two hundred eighty-eight were usable, resulting in a 61% response rate.

FINDINGS

NEWS-CHANNEL DEPENDENCE

The first hypothesis tested focused on within-group differences between the reported importance of the mass media and interpersonal channels as news sources. Every so often, in the study of foreign student groups, there is the temptation to percieve them as homogeneous by assumption. But in the test of this hypothesis, three considerations guided the combined use of the Ethiopian and Nigerian subsamples.

First, an initial test of significance (t-test) on the difference between the dependence on the mass media and interpersonal channels revealed only a few significant differences between both subgroups. Second, the comparatively small number of the Ethiopian subsample (N=29) made a separate test of this hypothesis unwarranted. Finally, the focus of the hypothesis was not on the differences between the subsamples of the African group, but on the differences between the dependence on the mass media and interpersonal channels within each of the total African and U.S. groups.

To test the hypothesis, respondents' scores on the importance of four U.S. mass media (television, radio, magazines, newspapers) as sources of U.S. and international news were reduced to a score that was comparable to that of interpersonal news channels.

Data in Table 1 provide only partial support for the hypothesis in that while the U.S. students show higher dependence on the mass media vis-a-vis interpersonal sources, the African students attach greater importance to the mass media (mean=3.30) as their sources of U.S. news and lesser importance (mean=2.87) to interpersonal channels ($t=5.44$, $p < .001$). This difference does not, however, emerge in their declared importance of the various news sources

for international news; interpersonal channels and the mass media are about equally important.

Insert Table 1 about here

Results also show that, in the African sample, interpersonal reliance came closer to mass media reliance, particularly for international news; that is, when compared with the t-values of the U.S. sample. Within the African group, the comparatively lower dependence on interpersonal channels may be explained by a finding by Selltiz, et al. (1963: 207-214, 274-276) that students from Third World nations, in comparison with those from European countries, established significantly fewer social contacts with Americans during their stay in the United States.

The hypothesis also suggested that U.S. students would depend significantly more on the mass media than on interpersonal channels for both kinds of news. Data in Table 1 supported this prediction. The mean rating of the mass media for U.S. news is 3.11, as against 2.61 for interpersonal channels ($t=10.28$, $p < .001$). For international news, the mean rating is 3.12 for the mass media, as against 2.56 for interpersonal sources ($t=10.91$, $p < .001$).

Data in Table 2 show a further test of Hypothesis 1. U.S. students had a significantly lower dependence on all but one medium: newspapers. Sub-Saharan African students generally attached greater importance than the U.S. sample to almost all of the mass media and interpersonal channels for both types of news. This finding directs attention to one major possibility: the African group seemed in quest of media news and extensively used news sources, a pattern that Okigbo (1985) found among Nigerian students in the United States in regard to their use of the media for Nigerian news.

Insert Table 2 about here

Contrary to the suggestion in Hypothesis 2 that the African sample will be less exposed to the U.S. media, results in Table 3 show that their mean weekly exposures to U.S. and foreign media were significantly higher for all but one medium: U.S. newspapers. This hypothesis, therefore, received only partial support.

Insert Table 3 about here

COUNTRY VARIABLES AND MEDIA EXPOSURE

This study also examined the relationships between each of four perception variables--perceived quality of political relations, perceptions of tension in political relations, perceived quality of trade relations and perceptions of tension in trade relations--and exposure to the media in the African sample. In the analysis of these perception variables, it was important that the two sub-Saharan African subsamples be treated separately because of the different country variables (Ethiopia and Nigeria) involved in the analysis. Also, differences exist in the political and economic relationships between each of these countries and the United States.

Results show that there were significantly more favorable perceptions of economic and political relations and significantly higher approval levels among Nigerians than among Ethiopians. However, although both subsamples had similar perceptions of tension in their countries' economic relations with the United States, they both had significantly different perceptions of tension in political relations ($t=2.36$, $p < .05$). Results, in general, show that there

was no relationship between exposure to U.S. news and the favorability of the perception of international relations.

SOCIABILITY VARIABLES AND MEDIA EXPOSURE

Other independent variables whose relationships with media exposure were investigated among the sub-Saharan African students were their length of stay in the United States, the extent of their "sociability" with U.S. nationals, and the extent of their interest in international news. The following results were indicated: (1) length of stay was not associated with the amount of exposure to the U.S. media; (2) a majority of the relationships between media exposure and "sociability" were non-significant, but there was an apparent tendency in the hypothesized direction;[1] and (3) there were significant relationships, in large part, between reported interest in international news and reported exposure to foreign news media.

The relationship between interest and exposure to foreign newspapers did not meet even the .05 significance level perhaps because of the comparative unavailability of foreign newspapers, especially those from sub-Saharan African nations, at the Midwestern university where the survey was conducted. Only a few foreign newspapers were also available off-campus. Results, however, were in the predicted direction.

Hypothesis 5(a) received substantial support across all four mass media (all p's < .001). Results indicated that the hypothesized relationship between foreign media use and visit to foreign countries and association with foreign nationals were generally significant at or beyond the .05 level.

But there seemed to be some indication that the U.S. students, in comparison with their African counterparts, had considerable difficulty in establishing access to the foreign media. While a high percentage of those students who said they were relatively interested in international news exposed

themselves more to international news in the domestic media--specifically newspapers and magazines--a comparatively smaller percentage exposed themselves to the foreign media. The effort required of them in the use of the foreign media may have been a crucial variable inhibiting access to, and the use of, such media. Caution is, however, advised in the interpretation of these results, since media-use patterns generally involve a more complex network of relationships than the data suggest.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATION

The main objective of this study was to investigate the patterns of exposure to interpersonal news channels and to the mass media in two sample groups: sub-Saharan African and U.S. students at a large Midwestern university.

Summary answers to the three research questions posed at the outset are:

(1) After reviewing the literature on the types of media available to the sub-Saharan African students prior to their arrival in the United States, the assumption was made that interpersonal news channels would be used relatively more in comparison with the mass media. The data showed that they often depended more on the mass media for U.S. news and about equally on interpersonal and media sources for international news.

(2) Data on the comparative dependence on the mass media and interpersonal channels for U.S. and international news by U.S. students led to the conclusion that the mass media were the preferred sources for both news types. Additionally, the difference between the dependence on the media and interpersonal channels was much larger among U.S. students than among African students.

(3) Sub-Saharan African students generally reported significantly higher exposures (at or beyond the .01 level) to U.S. and foreign mass media than did U.S. students.

Among U.S. students, the prediction that the amount of exposure to international news and to foreign news media would be positively related to the students' reported interest in international news, extent of foreign travel, and social contacts with foreign nationals in the United States was confirmed. But, among African students, our data showed that the perception of the favorability of international relations was not a factor in exposure to U.S. news. Perhaps the only overwhelming conclusion from the results of the relationships between the country variables and media exposure was that the perception of tension in political relations was significantly related to "high" exposure to radio news for both Ethiopians and Nigerians (both p's=.01). One possible explanation for this finding is that because radio's characteristic of the spoken word is consistent with Africa's oral tradition, it is generally perceived as the most effective way of reaching large audiences in Africa. It is, therefore, possible that our African respondents demonstrated a cultural response set in their listenership to radio news, even in the United States.

From a cross-cultural perspective, the findings of this study confirm observations of previous studies on the use of the mass media by U.S. audiences in general. It also provides evidence on the news-media preferences of a segment of the black and the (growing) foreign student population on U.S. campuses. Such evidence has implications for institutions and agencies in their continuing efforts to address some of the social issues facing international students and scholars on American campuses. Perhaps of interest to these agencies and institutions is a major policy implication of this study. It also points to a continuing issue in the media environment in the United States: the availability of foreign news to the indigenous and foreign audiences in the United States still leaves much to be desired.□

NOTE

1. Measures of sociability were number of homes invited to as a guest, U.S. homes stayed at one night or longer, and attendance at voluntary association meetings involving mostly Americans. The strongest relationships were found between (1) readership of U.S. news in U.S. newspapers and news magazines and the number of homes invited to as a guest (X^2=5.93, df=1, p=.01; X^2=4.75, df=1, p=.02, respectively); and (2) the viewership of television news and the frequency of attendance at voluntary meetings of organizations or associations involving mostly Americans (X^2=9.31, df=1, p=.002).

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TABLE 1

Mean Ratings of Comparative Importance of Mass Media and Interpersonal Channels as News Sources

News Source	U.S. Students (N = 288) Mean	Std. Dev.	t-value	Nigerians/Ethiopians (N = 149) Mean	Std. Dev.	t-value
Mass Media (U.S. news)	3.11	.43	10.28[a]	3.30	.43	5.44[a]
Interpersonal Channels (U.S. news)	2.61	.74		2.87	.88	
Mass Media (International news)	3.12	.48	10.91[a]	3.29	.50	0.44
Interpersonal Channels (International news)	2.56	.81		3.32	.79	

[a]Significant at the .001 level, at least.

NOTE: Means could range from 1 to 4. The higher the mean, the higher the importance of a news source.

TABLE 2

Mean Ratings of News Sources on Degree of Dependence

News Source	U.S. Students (N = 288) Mean	U.S. Students (N = 288) Std. Dev.	Nigerians/ Ethiopians (N = 149) Mean	Nigerians/ Ethiopians (N = 149) Std. Dev.	t-value	two-tailed probability
1. U.S. News						
Magazines	2.84	.76	3.09	.66	3.4	.001
Newspapers	3.42	.65	3.21	.63	3.2	.001
Radio	3.02	.83	3.24	.76	2.8	.005
Television	3.15	.84	3.64	.52	6.5	< .001
Friends, acquaintances, relatives	2.62	.74	2.87	.89	3.2	.002
2. International News						
Magazines	2.97	.82	3.29	.75	4.0	< .001
Newspapers	3.41	.75	3.22	.66	2.5	.010
Radio	2.99	.88	3.23	.74	3.0	.003
Television	3.14	.91	3.42	.71	3.3	.001
Friends, acquaintances, relatives	2.56	.81	3.32	.79	9.4	< .001

NOTE: Means could range from 1 to 4. The higher the mean, the higher the respondent's dependence on a news source.

TABLE 3

Mean Frequencies of Overall Mass Media Exposures per Week, by Sample Groups

	U.S. Students (N = 288)	Nigerians/ Ethiopians (N = 149)	t-value
U.S. Media Exposure			
Radio News	91.3	106.1	2.8[b]
Television News	56.8	105.7	10.4[a]
Newspapers	43.3	44.9	0.8
News Magazines	9.1	16.5	6.6[a]
Foreign Media Exposure			
Newspapers	1.3	4.0	4.7[a]
News Magazines	0.4	5.4	9.5[a]
Short-wave Radio Broadcasts	2.1	9.3	5.1[a]

[a] $p < .001$

[b] $p < .01$

NOTE: High scores indicate high exposures.